

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, Congressman Hinchey and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity testify on H.R. 4003, the Hudson River Valley Special Resource Study Act.

I am Bob Elliott and have been an active board member of the Hudson Valley Greenway Council for many years. I have served the Greenway in a number of capacities including being a member, from its inception, of the Committee which manages the Hudson Valley National Heritage Area. Until recently, I was New York State's Department of State's Deputy Secretary over-seeing, among others, those divisions dealing with local governments. I was the Mayor of Croton-on-Hudson from 1991 to 2005, served as President of New York's Conference of Mayors, Director of Economic Development for Westchester County, Executive Director of the Westchester Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and Chair of the Hudson Valley Tourism Development Council. I was the founder and President for many years of what is now known as Historic Hudson River Towns, a consortium of municipalities under an Inter-Municipal Agreement focused on tourism, main street revitalization, smart growth and economic development. In addition, I have served as the Executive Director of the New York Planning Federation.

As you know, H.R. 4003 would authorize the National Park Service to conduct a special resource study of the Hudson River Valley, from the southern tip of Westchester County, north to Rodgers Island at Fort Edward, in Washington County.

The area to be examined has some of the most important and unique cultural, historical, natural, recreational and scenic resources that have been central to the development and sustainment of our Nation.

The Hudson River Valley encompasses a rich array of sensitive natural resources ranging from the River itself and its vast estuarine district, to its wetlands, refuges, parks, forests, farmlands, preserves, cliffs, mountains and valleys. The vistas throughout the region are second to none and inspired one of America's great arts movements. Today, the Hudson Valley stands as one the country's premier river corridors.

The Hudson River and its tributaries are home to a number of rare and threatened animal species, habitats, and plants. These include globally rare freshwater tidal habitats such as Vosburg Swamp, iconic animals such as bald eagles, and endangered species like the shortnose sturgeon.

Recreational opportunities are abundant. The Hudson River Valley is home to myriad of biking, heritage, pedestrian and scenic trail systems on the eastern and western sides of the River that are now connected by the Walkway Over the Hudson bridge, which is the longest pedestrian overpass in the country and has been designated as a National Recreation Trail.

Starting from the vibrant Native American communities that first inhabited the land, the Hudson River Valley has played a central role in the development of our nation. In 1609, Englishman Henry Hudson, acting in service of the Dutch East India Company, was the first European to sail up the river later named for him in the vessel Half Moon, which was one of the most significant passages in the European exploration and discovery of America, and began some of the earliest contacts in the New World between Native Americans and Europeans.

The Hudson River Valley is where the seeds of independence were planted with the Albany Plan of Union and the region played a vital role in the military campaigns of the American Revolution and its ultimate resolution. Washington's Headquarters, Saratoga Battlefield are just two of scores of colonial historical sites that area spread throughout the region. Some of these places are National Historic Sites but most are not.

The region also was the home to a multiple of landmark events that moved the country from an agrarian to an industrial economy. The Hudson River was the site of first successful steamboat voyage by Robert Fulton in 1807. In addition, the region helped spark the modern labor and environmental movements.

The Hudson River Valley gave birth to important movements in American art, architecture and literature through the work of Andrew Jackson Downing, Alexander Jackson Davis, Thomas Cole, Frederick Church and their associates from the Hudson River School of Art, as well as through authors such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Susan and Anna Warner, and John Burroughs. The depictions and descriptions of the Hudson River Valley's renowned scenery and natural resources played a central role in the recognition of the value of the landscape and the development of an American esthetic and environmental ideal.

Individually, these resources and sites, although jewels, do not capture the story and total significance of the Valley and a study by the National Park Service could develop a stronger network of collaboration among the existing stakeholders and the vast number of historic sites to better permit the American people to enjoy, understand, and recognize this essential component of the American story.

Congressman Hinchey's proposal for a National Park Service special resource study has received broad support across the region. Multiple local newspapers, including the Albany Times Union, have editorialized in support of this legislation and others have supported the study with op ed pieces. The bill has been endorsed by an array of local organizations including Scenic Hudson, Clearwater, Riverkeeper, Historic Hudson River Towns, and the Hudson Mohawk Urban Cultural Park Commission.

This past year, New York celebrated the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage of the river that now bears his name. Thousands of people from across the world participated. This celebration has ignited a movement focused on the future of this region and how we can best preserve our unique treasures for the next 100 years. Given this unique moment and the world-class resources of the region, now is an ideal time to

authorize the NPS to study the Hudson River Valley for inclusion in the national park system.

In closing, thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to answering your questions.